2006 NOAA Fisheries Employee of the Year Nomination
Narrative

Nominee's Name: Last, First, Middle: **Nomination Category:**

McNatt, Regan — Program Employee – Management/Scientific/Technical (GS 1-10)
Northwest Fisheries Science Center

Address at Least One of the Following Factors in the Justification Below.

Regan McNatt is nominated as a 2006 NOAA Fisheries Employee of the Year for her contributions to the stewardship of Pacific salmon stocks in the Columbia River basin. Since coming to work with the Estuary Team of the Estuarine and Ocean Ecology Program, Regan has distinguished herself as an innovative researcher, dedicated employee, and valued ambassador for the agency. Her contributions over the last year have greatly benefited understanding of the habitat needs of juvenile salmon in the lower Columbia River estuary. These results will have a direct impact on future recovery efforts on behalf of Columbia River salmon and all stakeholders in the region.

In 2005, Regan helped to design and implement a study of juvenile salmon residency in a Columbia River estuarine wetland (Russian Island). No investigators had studied the duration of wetland use by Columbia River salmon, and it was unclear whether a mark-recapture approach for estimating wetland residency would be possible in such a large, open system. Despite considerable logistical difficulties, Regan's pilot study demonstrated the feasibility of conducting residency studies in estuarine wetlands by recapturing 8% of the 1500 marked salmon within a 17-day experimental period.

Based on her initial success, Regan independently designed a full residency study at Russian Island in 2006, using a combination of PIT (Passive Integrated Transponder) tags and colored dye to mark individuals and groups of salmon, a task typically conducted by staff at higher grade levels. Despite much lower fish densities than in the previous year, recapture efficiency for her revised study design increased 25%. The results directly documented the benefits of wetland habitat for Columbia River salmon, including their extended residence in shallow wetland habitats, which was unexpected since individuals must vacate the wetland twice each day during the low tide. Regan's results are among the first estimates of salmon growth rates and residency in the Columbia River estuary and clearly demonstrate the importance of shallow wetland habitats to subyearling salmon, critical information for salmon recovery efforts throughout the basin.

Based on this success, Regan has already designed a new companion study for 2007 to examine the factors that affect salmon use of wetland habitat. She has devised an innovative design that will make use of new PIT detection technology to remotely monitor salmon movements into and out of selected marsh channels. In developing her design, Regan has shown an incredible ability to seek and draw upon the expertise of individuals from diverse groups both within and outside NOAA Fisheries, including statisticians, engineers, technical support staff, and other fish biologists. Her willingness to work outside disciplinary boundaries and to seek advice and expertise from others has helped to bridge traditional boundaries that are often a barrier to creative research. Her intellectual curiosity and good humor have fostered cooperation across work elements of the agency. In her work, Regan has demonstrated considerable enthusiasm and dedication, taking responsibility not only for an important segment of our field research but in helping to improve the design and insure quality control for the estuary project database. These are qualities not often exhibited by staff in her position.

Beyond her daily work responsibilities, Regan has sought outreach opportunities to foster better understanding and support for NOAA Fisheries research and resource-stewardship activities in the local community. For example, Regan recently made a presentation about our estuarine research to a group of 50 volunteers at the Maritime Museum in Astoria. Her dedication to community service similarly applies to the Northwest Fisheries Science Center community. Regan is currently representing the Pt. Adams Field Station on the NWFSC Human Resources Management Team.

In her daily approach to her job, Regan provides leadership by example. Her positive attitude, enthusiasm, and respect for others readily open doors, benefiting not only her work but the work of those around her. Through her contributions to NOAA and to the science and conservation of salmon, Regan is highly recommended for the NOAA Fisheries Employee of the Year Award for 2006.